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ABSTRACT

This booklet was designed to inform, guide and support parents of children with special needs during their child's transition from an early intervention program (birth through age 2) into a preschool early educational setting. The first part of the booklet focuses on how the transition process works, including a description of the people who might be involved in planning the transition, the parents' rights and role, and the steps that need to be taken to determine a child's eligibility for continued services. The second part of the booklet discusses the process of developing a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). A transition checklist and a list of resources for more information is included at the end. (SG)

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Moving On

Planning your Child's Transition from the Family, Infant and Toddler Project to Essential Early Education

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Prepared by
The Transition at Age Three Subcommittee
of the
Vermont Early Childhood Work Group

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October 2001

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About Moving On

Developed by the Transition at Age Three Subcommittee and the Vermont Parent Information Center, we hope this booklet is helpful, informative and easy to read.

The committee acknowledges and values the expertise that parents have about their child and family, and we created Moving On to enhance family knowledge about planning for their child's transition to Essential Early Education (EEE).

The Transition at Age Three Subcommittee is part of the Vermont Early Childhood Work Group. The following members of the subcommittee helped to develop Moving On.

Kathy Andrews
Jean Beaston
Karen Burnell
Jessica Chen
Jack Conway
Connie Curtin
Paul Fassler
Shaunee Higgins
Donna Jerry
Terry Keegan
Steve Kinney
Linda Michniewicz
Beverly MacCarty
Melody Oldenburg
Ginger Potwin
Lee Sease
Doug Shiok
Liz Jordan-Shook

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INTRODUCTION

As parents of a young child receiving early intervention services, you play a key role in planning your child's move into a new educational setting. You want your child's transition to be successful and knowing what to do and who can help is important to you. Getting information, guidance and support can help you better understand the transition process and your role in it. *Moving On* was designed to do just that.

Whether your son or daughter is heading to an Essential Early Education (EEE) program or preschool, you will want to know what lies ahead and what you can do to help make this process work smoothly. We hope this booklet will serve as a guide in answering your questions and addressing your concerns. To identify information that might be most helpful, we asked parents what worked for them in planning their child's transition and what questions they had.

The first part of *Moving On* focuses on how the transition from Family, Infant and Toddler (FIT) services to Essential Early Education (EEE) may work. We describe the people who will help plan your child's transition and look at some steps your child's team may recommend. In the second part, we talk about the process to develop your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). At the end, we include a transition checklist and a list of resources to contact for more information.

For information about kindergarten, please refer to the booklet *Off to Kindergarten*. This booklet explains what to expect when your child enters school and contains questions that parents often have. A booklet describing the special education process at the time of transition to kindergarten is currently being developed. To find out how to get a copy, please turn to the resource list at the end of this booklet.

Dear Families,

As you begin the process of transitioning, you no doubt feel some anxiety. We all feel anxious when our children begin new stages, and as parents of children with special needs you may be feeling this even more intensely. Know that you are not alone in your feelings.

This does not mean that the changes ahead are bound to be difficult. Our family found that the best way to ensure this was to be well prepared. Think about what lies ahead. Ask questions about the things that you fear most. Explore issues prior to the IEP meeting. Talk to your child's therapists, to their preschool teachers, and to the people who will be at the IEP meeting. Ask and listen and ask again if need be. The team really does want things to go smoothly, and involved families will help that come about.

It also helped us to keep things in perspective. Transition is an ongoing event. We are always in transition. School years ahead will signal new concerns as we address new situations. Teams are in place to address needs as they arise. This particular time is a stepping stone in the road ahead.

It is a time when your child is moving on, and we found that we as a family were moving on as well. This was a time for us to grow and learn. Seek help when needed, but resolve to move on confidently. Life is about change. And "moving on" can bring unexpected moments worth celebrating.

Best wishes,

A parent

YOUR CHILD'S NEXT STEP

When your son or daughter turns three, he or she may move from Family, Infant and Toddler (FIT) services to Essential Early Education (EEE). Making the move from early intervention services to a new educational setting is referred to as transition. One of the first questions you may have as you begin this process is about the difference between Family, Infant and Toddler services and Essential Early Education.

Typically, the Family, Infant and Toddler Project (FITP) provides a broad array of services to children with special needs, birth through two, and their families. Some examples of FIT services include nursing, assistive technology, family support and training and home visits, nutrition and physical therapy. Through the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), each family sets goals based on their priorities and concerns and helps to identify the supports they will need to reach those goals.

When your child moves to EEE, the focus of the program is to address your child's educational needs. Essential Early Education is special education and related services, such as speech or physical therapy, for children with special needs, ages three through five. You and other members of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team develop goals for your child and decide on the type and frequency of his or her services.

Although your family's needs may not change at this time, the school's responsibility is to provide your child with an appropriate education as described in the IEP. During the transition process, it will be important to identify individuals and agencies that may assist your family in obtaining and paying for other services and supports, such as those you may have received as part of your IFSP.

BECOMING ELIGIBLE FOR ESSENTIAL EARLY EDUCATION

To qualify for EEE, your local school district may conduct a comprehensive evaluation of your child's abilities, strengths and needs. In most cases, when a child has been receiving early intervention services or speech therapy through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), the school district will wait until the current evaluation has been in effect for three years before conducting a new evaluation.

If your local school district evaluates your child at age three, an Evaluation and Planning Team, including you, will develop a plan. Based on the results of the evaluation, the team will make a decision regarding your child's eligibility for EEE. To learn more about the evaluation process, ask the team at a transition planning meeting to describe how your child may become eligible for EEE services.

A PLAN FOR TRANSITION

Writing a plan for your child's transition is an important part of the process. The plan you develop with others should describe activities designed to help your child make a smooth transition to Essential Early Education. Other information the plan should contain includes the individuals who will carry out activities, other services your child may require and possible funding sources.

At least six months before your child's third birthday, the IFSP service coordinator will inform your local school district that your child will be turning three. With your permission, he or she will set up one or more transition planning meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to develop a written plan describing steps that will enable your child to move from the Family, Infant and Toddler Project to Essential Early Education services.

With your consent, your IFSP service coordinator will send copies of your child's records to the school district's Essential Early Education program. Information sent to the school will include copies of your child's

- evaluations and other information used to determine eligibility
- Individualized Family Service Plans
- the consent form giving your written permission to release records
- pertinent contact notes

The transition planning meeting should take place at least 90 days before your child's third birthday. Meetings can happen sooner, however, if you believe that more time is

needed to get things in place. You can ask your IFSP service coordinator to set up a meeting as early as six months to one year before your child turns three.

With your permission, the IFSP service coordinator will schedule one or more meetings that include

- your family
- school district personnel
- a representative from the Family, Infant and Toddler Project
- other IFSP team members or service providers

You or other members of the IFSP team can also request that other individuals attend the meeting, such as a friend, family member or service provider. If your child is receiving support from Children with Special Health Needs (CSHN), a CSHN social worker may participate in meetings.

In some school districts, the team will also develop your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) at a transition planning meeting. Others create the IEP, with you, at a separate meeting. The IEP is a written plan that describes the special education and related services your child will receive. To find out when your child's first plan may be written and to learn more about the process, speak to your IFSP service coordinator or school district representative.

WHEN CHILDREN ARE *NOT* ELIGIBLE FOR EEE

If your child is not eligible for EEE services, the team will look at other options. At the transition meeting, you will discuss programs that can help your child grow and develop and get ready for kindergarten. Some of these programs include

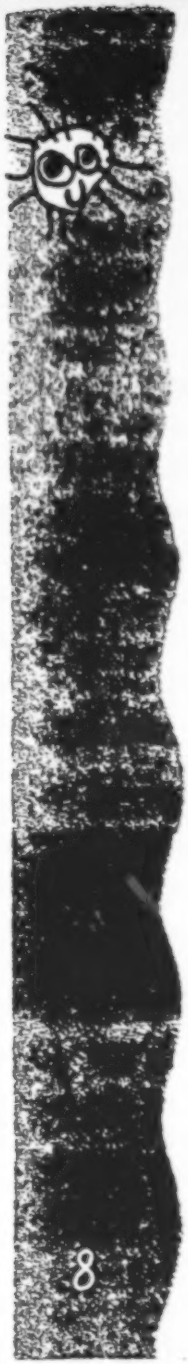
- community preschool
- child care center
- Head Start program
- parent child center services
- community play group

If you decide to place your child in a community-based setting, the school district is not responsible to pay for this program. Your IFSP service coordinator or community resource parent can help you become familiar with preschool programs in your area.

MAKING THE MOST OF MEETINGS

Parents have valuable information about their child that no one else has. During the transition planning process, you will have a chance to share what you know about your son or daughter with other team members.

Transition planning meetings will give you an opportunity to learn what lies ahead for your child and to share your hopes and dreams. Because the process you have become familiar with will change, these meetings can serve as a bridge from what you already know to new information. Take the time you need to ask questions, share concerns and discuss the goals you have for your child's education.



GATHERING AND SHARING INFORMATION

Listed below is some information parents can share at a transition planning meeting.

- Your child's strengths and abilities and medical, safety and learning needs
- A photograph of your child
- Why your child's current program works and the progress he or she has made during the past year
- Services you believe your child will continue to need and new services to help your child develop and learn, including education, therapeutic, medical and other supports
- Settings where your child might receive his or her EEE services
- Your family's long-term hopes and concerns for your child
- Special equipment/accommodations your child uses or may need
- How you want to be involved in your child's program
- Ways to communicate with EEE staff who work with your child

The following are suggestions for professionals in helping parents plan successfully for their child's move to a new educational setting.

- Share information about rights and roles in the Essential Early Education (EEE) process
- Explain the similarities and differences between Family, Infant and Toddler and Essential Early Education services
- Help connect the family to other resources and supports
- Answer questions about service options within the community
- Identify new individuals who may be working with the child
- Acknowledge the parents' unique knowledge about their child

Developed by a parent, here is a list of questions to ask during transition planning meetings.

- How does the transition process work?
- Where will my son receive his EEE services?
- Will my son lose some of the services he now receives?
- Is it possible for the current speech therapist to continue working with my son?
- Will my son have a support person?
- How can I get additional evaluations of my son's needs?
- If EEE services aren't working for my son, can I terminate them?
- Who will be our new service coordinator?
- Will my son still be eligible for other services he is currently getting, like child care funding and respite?
- What is my role in the EEE process and will I be treated as the expert on my child?

A NEW EDUCATION PLAN

An Individualized Education Program is developed for all children who transition to Essential Early Education. It's a written plan based on your child's individual needs and, as mentioned earlier, the IEP may be developed as part of a transition planning meeting. When moving to EEE services, your child's IEP will be completed by his or her third birthday. If your child turns three shortly before the end of the school year or over the summer, the team should write the IEP before the last day of school.

YOUR CHILD'S EEE SERVICES

At a meeting, you and other IEP team members will identify the special education and related services your child needs. The team will also decide on the place in which your child will receive these services, such as a community-based preschool or school-based integrated EEE program. Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to you, to meet your child's individual educational needs. Related services help your child benefit from special education and may include occupational therapy, physical therapy, transportation, speech therapy as well as other services.

Before an IEP meeting takes place, you will be notified by the school about the purpose of the meeting and who will attend. The meeting will be scheduled at a time and place that is mutually convenient for you and school personnel. Your child's early intervention service providers play an important role in helping to create the first IEP.

Members who attend the IEP meeting may be different from IFSP team participants. IEP team members should include

- parents
- a member of the IFSP team
- school district personnel
- other IFSP team members or service providers
- other EEE service providers

As a team, you will identify annual goals and short term steps to help your child meet these goals. You will also agree upon the kinds of services, supports and accommodations needed to help your son or daughter develop and retain skills and the individuals who will teach your child.

GETTING READY FOR THE IEP MEETING

Here are some suggestions to help you prepare for an IEP meeting.

- review and share information you gathered for transition planning
- identify other information you believe will help the team get to know your child
- review the special education rights you and your child have and ask questions if you need help understanding them
- identify goals and services you would like included on the IEP
- make a list of questions you have about the IEP process and programs for preschoolers offered by the school district
- visit educational settings in which your child may receive services
- ask a friend, support person or advocate to go to the meeting with you
- think about other supports your child may need in addition to education and how services will be coordinated

QUESTIONS ABOUT SERVICES

Parents have many questions about their child's new education program. One question they often ask is about the kind and amount of services their child will receive in EEE. Making decisions about services is the role of an IEP team. If the team agrees, it's possible that your son or daughter will continue to receive the same or similar services that were part of the IFSP. Some team members may believe, however, that your child's services should be changed based on evaluation information.

If you believe your child needs a specific service, you have the right to ask that it be included in the IEP. Put your request in writing, explaining your reasons for the request and sharing any information you may have to support your request. IEP decisions are made by consensus. When team members can't agree, the local education agency representative will make the final decision. If the school district refuses the request they must provide you with a written justification using form 9. You have the right to disagree with the decision made by the IEP team about your child's services. For more information about parental rights, see the resource section of this booklet.

Another question families ask is whether their child will receive services over the summer. While your child participated in the Family, Infant and Toddler Project, he or she received services year round. Essential Early Education services are provided only during the school year, unless the IEP team decides your child requires extended school year services. Extended school year services may be provided over the summer and during school breaks.

If you think your child needs year-round help, the IEP meeting is the place to have this discussion. In deciding whether your child may need extended school year services, the team will consider the type and severity of

your child's disability and evidence that he or she experiences a significant loss of skills that are not relearned in a reasonable length of time. Other areas the team should consider include

- whether a summer program is needed in order for your child to reach his or her IEP goals,
- whether your child loses skills over school breaks or vacations and how long it takes your child to catch up and
- areas of your child's program that may need ongoing attention.

YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENT

When services have been worked out, the team will discuss your child's educational placement. Educational placement refers to the setting in which your child will receive EEE services. In making a decision about placement, your child's team must look at a full range of settings, including community-based programs for preschool children. Some of the places in which children typically receive EEE services are early care and education programs such as preschool programs, child care centers, Headstart Programs, at home and in school-based programs.

Because each school district is different, one district may use community-based early care and education settings while another district may choose school-based programs for providing EEE services. If you disagree with the team's decision about your child's educational placement, there are steps you can take as part of your parental rights. Once the team agrees on your child's educational setting, you will be asked to give written consent to have your child begin receiving Essential Early Education services.

Now that your child has successfully moved to EEE you may still have questions about services or the IEP process. It will take time to become familiar with your child's new program and service providers. Setting up regular times to talk to your child's case manager and teachers can help you learn more about his or her program. You can also talk to other parents and professionals who work with your child.

MOVING ON

We hope this booklet has helped you gain a better understanding of what to expect when your child moves from the Family, Infant and Toddler Project to Essential Early Education. Your child's transition is a team effort, and the information you share with and receive from professionals plays a critical part in helping your child to learn and grow. Parents become full partners with professionals when they feel knowledgeable and as they contribute to the decisions being made about their child's Essential Early Education services.

Checklist of Steps in the Transition Process

- ❑ My child's IFSP service coordinator began to talk to me about the transition process when my child was 2 1/2 or before.
- ❑ My child's IFSP service coordinator notified my school district that my child would be turning three at least 6 months prior to his/her 3rd birthday.
- ❑ With my written permission we held a transition planning meeting and began to develop my child's transition plan at least 90 days before my child's third birthday.
- ❑ I shared ideas about what works well for my child.
- ❑ The transition plan includes activities, timelines and people responsible for carrying out the plan.
- ❑ I have learned about my special education parental rights and Essential Early Education services.
- ❑ My child's records have been given to my local school district, with my permission.
- ❑ I have visited Essential Early Education placement options for my child and talked to teachers and service providers.
- ❑ Before my child turned 3, we held a meeting to develop an IEP and to decide my child's educational placement.
- ❑ I have met my child's new teacher and service providers and had a chance to ask questions about my child's new program.

RESOURCES

If you would like more information, please contact the following resources:

Your school district's special education administrator
For information about your parental rights and Essential Early Education. Contact your superintendent's office to find out the name and telephone number of this individual.

Vermont Department of Education, Essential Early Education Consultant
Assistance for families and schools regarding Essential Early Education and parental rights.
(802) 828-5115

Association for Cerebral Palsy (ACP)
Serving people with cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities.
1-800-639-6480

Autism Society of Vermont
Providing information and support regarding children and adults with autism.
1-800-559-7398

Child Development Clinic (CDC), Department of Health
Offering evaluation and follow-up services for children with special needs.
1-800-640-4427

Children with Special Health Needs (CSHN), Department of Health
Provides specialized medical care for children with special health needs.
1-800-660-4427

Family, Infant and Toddler Project
Department of Health early intervention services for infants and toddlers who have a developmental delay or health condition and their families.
1-800-870-6758

Parents Assistance Line
Information, assistance, education and referral services for Vermont families.
1-800-727-3687

Parent Child Center Network
Assistance and education to families with very young children.
1-802-388-3171

Parent to Parent of Vermont
Support and information network for families with children who have a chronic illness, disability or who have been born prematurely.
1-800-800-4005

Vermont ARC
Support for individuals with mental retardation and their families.
802-655-2221

Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Support for students and education teams in the public school setting.
802-258-9530 (v/tty)

Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Assistance for families of children experiencing an emotional, behavioral or mental health challenge.
1-800-639-6071

Vermont Parent Information Center
Support for families of children with special needs regarding their child's education, development and special needs.
1-800-639-7170

For information about obtaining a copy of the booklet *Off to Kindergarten*, contact the Vermont Department of Education at 802-828-3892 or 802-828-5115.

Guiding Concepts on Transition

Transitions should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a single event.

Transition planning should begin early and ensure sufficient time dedicated by all involved.

Transitions involve changes for the family as well as the child.

The family's dreams, concerns, values, culture, language and experiences should be elicited, listened to and honored.

Those planning transitions must keep in mind the child's and family's strengths, needs and preferences.

The family must be encouraged and supported to take an active role in helping to plan their child's transition.

The family should be assisted in understanding how services and supports will be provided in the next environment.

A planning process must be developed that is outcome based, written, followed and clearly understood by all.

A collaborative spirit and partnership among all is to be promoted.

Coordination must be enhanced, alleviating duplication and overlap of services and efforts.

Regular contact among all team members must be assured.

Confidentiality for all parties concerned is respected.

A comprehensive plan is based on the child's and family's unique situation, not on labels or programs.

The number of changes, settings, evaluations and new people that a child and family experience as a result of transition should be kept to a minimum.

When necessary, the child and family will be linked with naturally occurring supports and activities available in their own community. When none exist, they are created.

Children should be included and supported in community environments with their peers.

All existing strengths and resources of families, programs and communities will be examined and utilized.

Statewide equity and access to transition processes and resources for all children and families should be promoted.

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Kathleen Andrews	Kathleen Andrews, EEE Consultant	
Organization/Address: VT Dept of Education, 120 State St, Montpelier VT 05602	Telephone: 828-5115	Fax: 828-0593
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